

Giving Our Spirits Control over Our Bodies

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One of the most important things we can learn in this life is how to emphasize our eternal spiritual nature and control our evil desires.

My dear brothers and sisters, as October general conference approached last year, I prepared my conference talk to highlight the 100th anniversary of the vision of the spirit world given to President Joseph F. Smith on October 3, 1918.

A few days after I had submitted my talk for translation, my beloved eternal companion, Barbara, completed her mortal probation and passed into the spirit world.

As the days have turned into weeks, then months, and now a year since Barbara's passing, I find myself more fully appreciating this scripture: "Thou shalt live together in love, insomuch that thou shalt weep for the loss of them that die."¹ Barbara and I were blessed to "live together in love" for 67 years. But I have learned in a very real way what it means to "weep for the loss" of those we love. Oh, how I love and miss her!

I suppose most of us fail to fully appreciate what others do for us until they are gone. I knew Barbara was always busy, but I did not fully understand the constant family, Church, and community demands upon her time. There were daily consecrated efforts repeated thousands of times through the years that kept our family functioning. And through it all, no one in our family ever heard her raise her voice or say an unkind word.

Floods of memories have washed over me this past year. I have thought about the physically demanding choice she made to be the mother of seven children. Being a homemaker was the only career she ever wanted, and she was in every aspect a consummate professional.

Often I have wondered how she kept track of our children and me. Meal preparation alone was a truly daunting task, not to mention activities such as doing the mountains of laundry our family generated every week and keeping shoes and appropriately sized clothing on the children. We all turned to her on a myriad of other issues that were important to us. And because they were important to us, they were also important to her. She was, in a word, magnificent—as a wife, as a mother, as a friend, as a neighbor, and as a daughter of God.

Now that she has moved on, I am happy that I chose to sit next to her when I came home from the office during the last few months of her life, to hold her hand as we watched the endings of some of her favorite musicals—over and over again because Alzheimer's would not allow her to remember that she had seen them just the

afternoon before. Memories of those special hand-holding sessions are now very, very precious to me.

Brothers and sisters, please do not miss an opportunity to look into the eyes of your family members with love. Children and parents, reach out to each other and express your love and appreciation. Like me, some of you may wake up one day to discover that the time for such important communication has passed. Live each day together with hearts filled with gratitude, good memories, service, and much love.

During this past year, I have pondered more intently than ever before about our Heavenly Father's plan. In teaching his son Corianton, Alma referred to it as "the great plan of happiness."²

The word that keeps coming to my mind now when I consider the plan is "reunion." It is a plan, designed by our loving Father in Heaven, that has at its center the grand and glorious possibilities of family reunion—of eternally reuniting husbands and wives, parents and children, generation upon generation in the household of God.

That thought brings me comfort and the assurance that I will be with Barbara again. Although she physically suffered toward the end of her life, her spirit was strong, noble, and pure. She had prepared herself in all things so that when the day comes, she can stand before "the pleasing bar of God,"³ full of confidence and peaceful assurance. But here I am, in two days 91 years old, and I'm still wondering, "Am I ready? Am I doing everything I need to do to be able to hold her hand once again?"

The most simple, basic certainty of life is this: We are all going to die. Whether we die old or young, easy or hard, wealthy or indigent, beloved or lonely, nobody escapes death.

A few years ago, President Gordon B. Hinckley said something that is particularly meaningful about this: "How sweet is the assurance, how comforting is the peace that come from the knowledge that if we marry right and live right, our relationship will continue, notwithstanding the certainty of death and the passage of time."⁴

I certainly married right. Of that there can be no doubt. But that isn't enough, according to President Hinckley. I also have to live right.⁵

Today, "living right" can be a pretty confusing concept, especially if you spend much time on social media, where any voice can declare real truths or false concepts about God and His plan for His children. Thankfully, members of the Church have eternally true gospel principles to know how to live so that we might be better prepared when we must die.

Just a few months before I was born, my Apostle grandfather, Elder Melvin J. Ballard, gave a talk that, for some people, captured the essence of what it means to live right. Titled "Struggle for the Soul," his talk focused on the ongoing battle between our physical bodies and our eternal spirits.

He said, “The greatest conflict that any man or woman will ever have ... will be the battle that is had with self,” explaining that Satan, “the enemy of our souls,” attacks us through “the lusts, the appetites, the ambitions of the flesh.”⁶ So the primary battle is between our divine and spiritual nature and the carnal natural man. Brothers and sisters, remember, we can receive spiritual help through the influence of the Holy Ghost that can “teach you all things.”⁷ Help can also come through the power and blessings of the priesthood.

Now, I ask, how is this battle going with each one of you?

President David O. McKay said: “Man’s earthly existence is but a test as to whether he will concentrate his efforts, his mind, his soul, upon things which contribute to the comfort and gratification of his physical nature, or whether he will make as his life’s [purpose] the acquisition of spiritual qualities.”⁸

This battle between our carnal and our spiritual natures isn’t a new thing. In his final sermon to his people, King Benjamin taught that “the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord.”⁹

The Apostle Paul taught that “they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.

“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”¹⁰

It seems clear to me that one of the most important things we can learn in this life is how to emphasize our eternal spiritual nature and control our evil desires. This should not be that difficult. After all, our spirit, which has been around a lot longer than our physical body, has already been successful in choosing righteousness over evil in the premortal realm. Before this earth was formed, we lived in the spirit world as sons and daughters of Heavenly Parents, who loved us and continue to love us now.

And yes, we did have to make life-changing decisions and choices in that premortal realm. Every person who has ever lived or ever will live on this planet made an essential decision to choose to accept Heavenly Father’s plan for our salvation. So we all came to earth with a proven track record of a successful spiritual nature and eternal destiny.

Think about that for a moment. This is who you and I really are and who you have always been: a son or daughter of God, with spiritual roots in eternity and a future overflowing with infinite possibilities. You are—first, foremost, and always—a spiritual being. And so when we choose to put our carnal nature ahead of our spiritual nature, we are choosing something that is contrary to our real, true, authentic spiritual selves.

Still, there’s no question that flesh and earthly impulses complicate the decision-making. With a veil of forgetfulness drawn between the premortal spirit world and

this mortal world, we can lose sight of our relationship to God and our spiritual nature, and our carnal nature can give priority to *what we want right now*. Learning to choose the things of the Spirit over the things of the flesh is one of the primary reasons why this earthly experience is part of Heavenly Father's plan. It's also why the plan is built upon the solid, sure foundation of the Atonement of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ so that our sins, including the errors we make when we yield to the flesh, can be overcome through constant repentance and we can live spiritually focused. Now is the time to control our bodily appetites to comply with the spiritual doctrine of Christ. That is why we must not procrastinate the day of our repentance.¹¹

Repentance, therefore, becomes an indispensable weapon in our battle over self. Just last general conference, President Russell M. Nelson referred to this battle and reminded us that “when we choose to repent, we choose to change! We allow the Savior to transform us into the best version of ourselves. We choose to grow spiritually and receive joy—the joy of redemption in Him. When we choose to repent, we choose to become more like Jesus Christ!”¹²

Every night as I review my day in prayer with my Father in Heaven, I ask to be forgiven if I did anything wrong and promise to try to be better tomorrow. I believe this regular daily repentance helps my spirit remind my body who is in charge of me.

Another resource is the weekly opportunity we all have to refresh ourselves spiritually by partaking of the sacrament in remembrance of the Atonement and the perfect love that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, has for us.

Brothers and sisters, I encourage you to slow down a bit and think about where you are now in subjugating your carnal nature and empowering your divine, spiritual nature so when the time comes, you may pass into the spirit world to a joyful reunion with your loved ones—for which I testify and humbly pray in the sacred name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.